

# *Getting Started*

As a library Board member, you have two primary responsibilities: to govern the library, and to help keep the Board functioning at optimum level. Both are equally important.

To govern the library, you must plan and monitor finances and services, as well as guide and evaluate the library's progress. Accomplishing these tasks requires knowledgeable Board members who understand and value the concept of teamwork.

As you gain experience on the Board, you will continue to learn facts, statistics, history, procedures and more. But first things first:

- ✓ **Get to know the other people who serve on the Board with you—not just their names, but who they are.** What are their interests and concerns? What motivates them to serve on the library Board? Team building begins by knowing your teammates.
- ✓ **Get to know the director, the other part of the Board team.** There must be a very high level of trust between the Board who governs the library and the person who manages the library.
- ✓ **Recognize that this job deserves your very best effort.** Although you are a volunteer, the governance of the library demands the best job you can do. It will require your time and your effort.
- ✓ **Find out where to go for answers to your questions.** Your best defense against being totally lost in the early stage of your term as a Board member is to learn where to find quick answers to tough questions. The director and other Board members are the best sources for learning about the library. This handbook will serve as a guide to the basics of good Board membership, and it will answer many of your questions.

## *Trustee Orientation*

The library Board is responsible for conducting Board orientation for new trustees. Typically, Board orientation includes a tour of the library, receipt of written materials and a meeting with other trustees. During this orientation period, it is a good idea to have experienced trustees work with new members. An experienced trustee can point out which materials are used most often and which will require further study.

## *Library Tour*

During the library tour, the director can explain how the library works, introduce the staff and demonstrate how the programs and services operate.

## *Materials*

Information provided to a new trustee might include the following.

### *Board materials*

- this handbook
- trustee job description
- copy of *Montana Library Laws and Public Library Standards*
- list of Board members and their addresses, phone numbers and email addresses
- Board bylaws
- Board code of ethics
- annual calendar of major Board and library activities
- minutes of the library Board meetings for the past year
- list of committees, job descriptions and current members

### *Library materials*

- library policies
- written mission statement of the library
- copy of the ordinance establishing the library
- documents that report the history of the library
- long-range plan of the library
- current budget
- financial reports for the past year
- timeframe for developing and approving the budget

- job description for the director
- staff organizational chart, including names
- annual reports for the last five years
- major contracts the library has with other public or private agencies
- marketing materials, brochures or newsletters

## *Orientation Meeting*

The director and a few experienced trustees usually participate in the orientation meeting. It is best if this meeting is scheduled a few days after the tour, which gives new trustees time to review the written materials.

The meeting agenda should include:

- ▣ discussion of the library's mission, goals and objectives, short- and long-range plans.
- explanation of the budget, sources of funding, expenditures and the library's financial status.
- review of the past six-months' Board minutes and director's reports to give the new trustee a sense of who the Board members are and how the Board works.
- review of the policy manual, explaining policies and procedures.
- explanation of reimbursement policy for trustee expenses and the law prohibiting trustees from receiving compensation for their work.
- explanation of the library's relationship to local governing authorities, both elected and appointed.
- explanation of the library's relationship to its library federation, State Library and state and national associations.
- discussion of the respective roles and responsibilities of the trustees and the director, emphasizing that the trustee's responsibilities do not include management of the library.
- discussion of the roles of trustees as individuals versus the Board, emphasizing that duly appointed individual trustees are only spokespersons for the Board; the Board as a whole has decision-making powers.

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*Being a public library trustee means being  
confronted by daunting problems and exciting possibilities.  
How you respond affects the future  
of library services in Montana.*

Montana State Library  
<http://msl.mt.gov>

MLA  
[www.mtlib.org](http://www.mtlib.org)

ALA  
[www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

ALTA  
[www.ala.org/alta](http://www.ala.org/alta)

MPLA  
[www.mpla.us](http://www.mpla.us)

PNLA  
[www.pnla.org](http://www.pnla.org)

## *Continued Learning*

Effective library trusteeship requires ongoing learning and training. There are many opportunities for you and your Board to keep learning, including the following recommendations.

### *Essential*

- Set aside time at each meeting to review an aspect of the library's administration or services.
- Rotate meeting locations at branches of a system.

### *Good ideas*

- Join the Montana Library Association (MLA).
- Attend MLA's annual conference and other events.
- Attend State Library-sponsored events.

### *Other opportunities*

- Attend the American Library Association (ALA) annual conference.
- Participate in professional organizations: Mountain Plains Library Association (MPLA), the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA) and Association of Library Trustees and Advocates (ALTA).

See Chapter 18, Libraries and Library Organizations, for more information about the library organizations mentioned here.

## *Library Board Education Program (LBEP)*

LBEP provides free customized Board training on a variety of topics related to trustee responsibilities and library law. Conducted by experienced trustees who volunteer their time, the workshops run from one to three hours and are held at the local library. The program is funded by the Library Services and Technology Act. You can contact the State Library for more information or to schedule a training workshop.

## *Montana Library Event Calendar*

This online statewide training/event calendar provides a focused source of information for library-related activities that trustees and libraries can use as a planning tool. The calendar is managed by the State Library and Lewis and Clark County Library in Helena.

<http://calendar.mtlib.org>

# *What Did You Learn?*

You will continue to learn about the library for as long as you remain on the Board. But you need to know some things from the beginning. Did you learn the answers to the following questions in your trustee orientation?

## **...About the Board?**

- ☐ Who has appointed the Board members and for what terms of office?
- ☐ Who are the current officers of the Board?
- ☐ How are the Board officers elected?
- ☐ Who is the official spokesperson for the Board?

## **...About the library?**

- ☐ What is the library's mission statement?
- ☐ What are the long-range goals of the library?
- ☐ When was the library organized and what is the service area?
- ☐ How many people does the library serve?
- ☐ What local/state/national legislative issues could affect the library?
- ☐ What is the relationship between the library and the local government?
- ☐ Has the library or the Board ever been involved in litigation?
- ☐ What major problems does the library currently face?
- ☐ Does the library meet the Public Library Standards?

## **...About library personnel?**

- ☐ How long has the present director held his/her position?
- ☐ What training does the director have for managing the library?
- ☐ What is the process used to evaluate the director?
- ☐ How many staff does the library have and what do they do?

## **...About library finances?**

- ☐ What is the library's annual budget?
- ☐ Where does the money come from to finance the library?
- ☐ What are the total assets of the library?
- ☐ Does the library have any debt service?
- ☐ Does the city/county own or rent the library facility?
- ☐ What equipment does the library own or rent?
- ☐ Are Board members reimbursed for expenses and, if so, how?